ELECTION

"God's elect, holy a[illegible]loved."
Col. 3: 1[illegible]

BY
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BY grace have ye been saved," says Paul to the Ephesians, Eph. 2:5, 8; and so important does it seem to him that his readers shall understand this and bear it on their hearts that he says it twice in the course of four verses. He says it in such a way, moreover, as to throw a tremendous emphasis on the word "grace," and therefore on the manner in which they had been saved, as distinguished from the salvation itself. He is not assuring the Ephesians that they had been saved. They knew that for themselves, and were rejoicing in this wonderful thing which had come to them. What he is eagerly repeating to them, intent on fixing it so firmly in their hearts that they cannot escape from it for a moment, is that it is just "by grace" that they have been saved.

He is engaged in this context in reminding his readers of the greatness of their salvation. They had been dead in their trespasses and their sins, children of wrath by nature, like the rest of men. But God is rich in mercy and has loved them mightily. Because of this his great love for them, he has come to them, lying helplessly dead in their sins, and has made them alive in Christ. Here the apostle breaks in on himself to cry, for the first time, "By grace have ye been saved"! God has raised them with Christ and

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seated them with him in the heavenly places, for no other reason than that he might show forth in the ages to come the surpassing riches of his grace, as manifested in this his kindness to them in Christ Jesus, for—the apostle now adds with iterant emphasis—"by grace have ye been saved."

We see that the apostle is most eager to impress on his readers this one fact, asserted and reasserted as the one thing needful for them to keep fully in mind, that it is by grace that they have been saved; that it is by grace, and nothing else than grace, that they have been saved. In this reiterated phrase we have in effect the heart of the heart of his gospel, to know which is our prime necessity if we are to know what that gospel is. The whole gospel turns as upon its hinge on this fact, that salvation is of pure grace.

There are, especially, three ideas which are conveyed by the word "grace," all of which must be given full validity if we are to understand what the apostle was impressing with such earnestness upon the Ephesians.

The first of them is the idea of power. Grace is power. And it is only because grace is power that it can save, save dead men, men dead in trespasses and sins. If men were not dead, possibly they might be saved by something else than power. By good advice, say; by pointing out to them something, some good thing, to do, by which they might inherit eternal life. That is what the law does. And that is why the law cannot save, cannot, that is, save dead men. The law tells us what we ought to do. Because

the law is the law of God, perfect and holy and just and good, it tells us perfectly what we ought to do. But it is of no avail to tell dead men what they ought to do. Dead men cannot do anything. They need not instruction but life; not good counsel but power. That is the reason why Paul, when he is assuring the Romans that the salvation which had been begun in them should certainly be completed, hangs it all on the fact that they were not under law but under grace. "Sin shall not have dominion over you," he promises them—and what a great promise that is!—"sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace." Rom. 6:14. If they were under law, sin certainly would have dominion over them. Law can do nothing but tell us what is right and what is wrong; and after that there is nothing that it can do. It cannot enable us to do the right and refuse the wrong which it has made known to us. But grace is power. It does not instruct, it energizes; and what dead men need is energizing, such energizing as raises the dead. Only God's grace, which is almighty power, can do that. It is, says Paul, Eph. 1:19, 20, the same "working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." This is the first idea which is conveyed by the word "grace," when we are told that it is by grace that we have been saved. Grace is power, and because it is God's grace, it is almighty power.

The second idea conveyed by it is the idea of love. Grace is power. But it is not bare power; "wild" power, as we say; power opera-

ting without direction, producing any variety of effects. It is power directed by love. That is the fundamental meaning of the word "grace"—favor, love, yearning desire. And that is what grace always means, when it is spoken of in the New Testament with reference to God. It always expresses the idea of good will, kindness, favor, love. Power, in itself considered, may blast as well as bless. The power that grace is, always blesses, because grace is love. The grace of God is the power of God, exerted in kindness; it is the love of God acting, according to its nature, in blessing. And therefore, in the passage from Ephesians which has been in our mind, Eph. 2: 1-10, it is because he is telling his readers that it was due only to the riches of God's mercy and "his great love wherewith he loved us" that we are saved, that Paul is led to interject suddenly in explanation of it all, "By grace have ye been saved." To be saved in the riches of God's mercy because of the greatness of his love—that is what it is to be saved by grace. For the same reason, when Paul comes to speak, a little later, of the manifestation of the exceeding riches of God's grace in our salvation, he explains that the precise thing in which these exceeding riches of God's grace are manifested, is "kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Grace is manifested in kindness: to deal kindly with us is to deal graciously with us. The second idea which is conveyed by the word "grace," when we are told that it is by grace that we are saved, then, is that we owe our salvation purely to the love of God. Grace is love; and because it is God's grace by which we are saved, our

salvation is a pure product of the love of God.

The third idea conveyed by the word "grace" is the idea of gratuitousness. Grace is gratuitous just because it is love, that is, because it is the "love of benevolence," as we say, the love that is good will, kindness, favor. It is the very nature of the love that is good will, kindness, favor, that it is gratuitous. We might do something, perhaps, to attract to ourselves, to secure, to deserve the "love of complacency," that is to say, the kind of love that seeks and finds gratification for itself in its object, rather than is intent only on benefiting its object; that seeks its own pleasure in its object rather than purely seeking to do it good. But that is not the kind of love that grace is. Grace is the love that is good will, kindness, favor, and the love that is good will, kindness, favor is in the nature of the case gratuitous. At all events this is what the Bible speaks of when it speaks of the grace of God. Paul, for instance, is at great pains to make it clear that the grace of God is not earned by us, is not secured by us, is not obtained by us; but is just given to us, comes to us purely gratuitously. What is of grace, he tells us, is by that very fact not of works; if it be in any way, in the slightest measure, earned, by that very fact it ceases to be of grace. Rom. 11:6. He carries the idea, indeed, to its extreme height. Grace, with him, is not only pure kindness, kindness which has not been earned (had it been earned, it would have ceased to be kindness), but kindness to the undeserving in the positive sense, kindness to the ill-deserving. Grace is very distinctly and very emphatically love to the ill-

deserving. This is the third idea which is conveyed by the word "grace" when we are told that it is by grace that we have been saved. Our salvation is a pure gratuity from God. We have not earned it; we have not secured it; we have not obtained it. God has fixed upon us in the riches of his mercy and the greatness of his unconstrained love, pouring out upon us in the exceeding riches of his grace his pure kindness in Christ Jesus.

This is then what Paul means when he tells us with reiterated emphasis that it is by grace, by grace and nothing else than grace, that we have been saved. He means that we have not saved ourselves. It is God who has saved us, God and God alone. If we had saved ourselves, or supplied anything whatever which entered into our salvation as in any measure its procuring cause, it would not have been distinctively by grace that we have been saved; and Paul's strong emphasis on the assertion that it is "by grace," that it is by nothing else than grace, that we have been saved would be misplaced. We were in point of fact dead in our trespasses and sins and therefore utterly unable to move hand or foot to seek salvation. We were helplessly and hopelessly "lost." We owe our salvation wholly to God's kindness, to his undeserved love, to his "grace." It is all from him, in its beginning and middle and end: all from him. Just as Lazarus was called out of the grave by the sheer power of the God who raises the dead, we have been called out of our death in trespasses and sins by the sheer grace of God, the grace which is the power of God, working

under the direction of his ineffable love, poured out in gratuitous kindness upon ill-deserving sinners. We have not made the first step in knowledge of the salvation of God until we have learned, and made the very center of our thought of it, this great fact: that it is by the pure grace of God, by that and that alone, that we are saved. That, as we have said, is the heart of the heart of the gospel.

Now, of course, no one will imagine that God, who saves us thus by his almighty grace, has saved us by the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, inadvertently, without meaning to do so. Of course he has meant to save us, just as he does save us, by his pure grace; and has meant thus to save us all along. It is this, his meaning to save us by his grace before he actually does so, which we call "election." Election, we thus see, is but the first moving of God's grace looking to our salvation; and therefore Paul calls it "the election of grace," Rom. 11:5, the election, that is, which has its origin in the grace of God toward us, which proceeds from it, comes out of it as its appropriate manifestation. It is the first step of God's love, as he prepares to save us by his grace, the setting of his love upon us, that in its own good time and way it may work its will on and in us. It is nothing, in other words, but God's purpose to save us, a purpose which he must, of course, form before he saves us, and a purpose which equally of course he fulfills in saving us. What God purposes he certainly per-

forms, no purpose of his is idle or ineffective. This, his purpose of salvation, therefore becomes the sure beginning and pledge of our actual salvation and draws in its train all else that enters into our salvation.

Read Rom. 8:29, 30, and see "the golden chain" which, as a fine old divine, John Arrowsmith, puts it, "God lets down from heaven that by it he may draw up his elect thither." "For whom he foreknew"—that is election, the setting upon his people with distinguishing pre-occupation and love, according to the pregnant use of "know" in such a passage say, as Amos 3:2, "You only have I known out of all the families of the earth"—"for whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son"—this is the high destiny prepared for us!—"that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Count these five golden links, all acts of God's own, working our salvation, and note how they are welded together in one unbreakable chain, so that all who are set upon in God's gracious distinguishing view are carried on by his grace, step by step, up to the great consummation of that glorification which realizes the promised conformity to the image of God's own Son. It is "election," you see, that does all this; for "whom he foreknew, . . . them he also glorified." That fine old divine to whom we have just referred tells us further that "election, having once pitched upon a man, will find him out and call him home, wherever he be. Zacchæus

out of cursed Jericho. Abraham out of idolatrous Ur of the Chaldeans; Nicodemus and Paul out of the college of the Pharisees, Christ's sworn enemies; Dionysius and Damaris, out of superstitious Athens. In whatever dunghill God's jewels be hid, election will both find them out there and fetch them out from thence." "Rejoice," our Saviour cried, Luke 10:20, "rejoice in this—that your names are written in heaven," in, that is, the Lamb's book of life, Rev. 21:27, which this same fine old divine counsels us always to remember, is "a book of love—the writing of our names in which is the firstborn of all God's favors."

That God has set upon just us in this his electing grace, must ever be to us a matter of adoring wonder. Certain it is, that there was nothing in us, whether quality or deed, which could attract his favorable notice, much less make him partial to us, and, moreover, there is no respect of persons with God. We were dead, dead in trespasses and sins, even as others, and therefore the children of wrath even as they. Eph. 2:1-3. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," Rom. 1:18; and surely there has been enough ungodliness and unrighteousness in us. That God has chosen just us from among our fellows to be saved from this wrath, I Thess. 5:9, finds no explanation in us. We can only say, "Yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight." Matt. 11:26. It has all hung upon his mere good pleasure, and he has given us this unspeakable blessing for no other reason than that he has chosen to give it

to us in the unsearchable counsels of his own gracious will. For, as our fine old divine reminds us we are "predestinated after the counsel of his own will, not after the good inclinations of ours." We had no good inclinations of will; men dead in trespasses and sins have no good inclinations. All that is good in us, in the inclinations of our wills as in the conduct of our lives, is from him, the product of his electing grace, and cannot be its cause. It is only because God has set upon us in his inexplicable love, and has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son, that, through his calling, and justifying, and sanctifying grace—all in execution of his gracious election—any good is formed in us. It is not "of works," says Paul, Eph. 2:9, 10, that we are saved but "for good works"; and he adds that, in order that we may do these good works, we have needed to be made over, and that by so profoundly revolutionary a change that we can be looked upon as nothing less than a new creation—"for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works," the good works which God has afore prepared that we should walk in them.

The very good works which we do, then, have been prepared for us by God in his electing grace, that we should walk in them. We are not chosen because we are good; we are chosen that we may be good. That is precisely what we are elected to—goodness, holiness. And that again is what is meant by the declaration that we have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son: we can become like him only as we become holy. Accordingly we are told with

the richest fullness of expression, Eph. 1:3, 4, that God chose us "in Christ . . . before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him . . . having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace." It is all here—the rooting of all our goodness in the elective decree of God, and the rooting of that decree in God's mere good pleasure. Everything else hangs on election, election itself on God alone. But what is especially emphasized is that what God has chosen us to, in this electing decree, is that we should be holy.

It follows, therefore, that those whom God has set upon in his electing grace, certainly shall be holy. This is what he has chosen them to—that they shall be holy. And, having chosen them to be holy, he has not left them to themselves, but, in his infinite grace, has taken them in hand to make them holy. That is why he has predestinated them to be conformed to the image of his Son, and then in pursuance of this destination of them, called them and justified them and sanctified them, yea, and will glorify them. These are the several processes through which he frames them into the holiness to which he has chosen them. They are not shallow processes, moving only on the surface and depending on our independent coöperation to produce their effects, and therefore liable to fail because of our weaknesses and sins. In these processes God remakes us and therefore we emerge from them his workmanship, created unto the good works which he has "afore prepared that we should

walk in them." It is wholly of God that we are in Christ Jesus, I Cor. 1:30; II Cor. 5:18; and being in Christ Jesus, we are new creatures, II Cor. 5:17—the old things have passed away and all things have become new. As, under the molding hand of God, we are being thus renewed in the spirit of our minds, we put off more and more the old man and "put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth," Eph. 4:24, we rejoice with trembling, because surely we see that the Lord is in this place. Full of joy, because we perceive the hand of God upon us, working in us both the willing and the doing, we "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," Phil. 2:12—that is to say, not with hesitation and doubt lest it may not be real, but with overmastering awe that it should be so with us, that God should be the impulsive cause of all of both our willing and doing.

It is precisely in this that we have the salvation of our God. For it is in this that the salvation to which we have been chosen consists: that we should be God's workmanship, created unto the good works which God has "afore prepared that we should walk in them"; that we should be holy; that we should be conformed to the image of God's Son. Of course, when we are like Christ we are saved men. Certainly we do not yet see all that is included in this high destiny. But we already know that when he shall be manifested, "we shall be like him." I John 3:2. And having this hope in us, we purify ourselves, "even as he is pure." I John 3:3. Our eyes are set on the goal; and we run with stead-

fastness the race that is set before us, "looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith," Heb. 12:1, looking unto him not only as he who has framed the faith in us by which we live in him, and who will perfect it to the end, but also as the model to which we shall be conformed. For what we shall attain to in this salvation is nothing less than "the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." The glory that he has shall be ours. And the way we shall attain to it is "in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." For this, says Paul, II Thess. 2:13, is what God chose us to from the beginning—"salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." And to this, he adds, God also called us—"to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." All that is contained in this glory which Christ possesses, and which we shall in him obtain, who can tell? No doubt we must cast our eyes forward to the world to come to see it all. When he shall be manifested, "we shall be like him." But when we obtain it all, it is still the salvation to which God chose us from the beginning, "in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." These are the means through which that is reached.

Clearly God has not chosen us to sloth. The salvation to which he has chosen us is a salvation "in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." We have not been chosen to any salvation which does not stand in sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. If we do not believe the truth, if we are not being sanctified by the Spirit, we have been chosen to no salvation. What we have been chosen to is that

we should be holy and without blemish before God. We cannot profess to be chosen of God, then, unless we are becoming holy and without blemish before him. It is not possible that there should be an "elect race" which is not also a "holy nation"—a holy nation which shows forth the excellencies of him who has called us "out of darkness into his marvellous light." I Peter 2:9. Seeing that predestination is to conformity to the image of God's Son, we are not predestinated unless we are being conformed to the image of God's Son. Unless we are like Christ, we cannot share in his glory. It is idle then to dream, profanely, that, being elected to bliss, we may be careless of good works. Precisely what God has prepared for his elect is good works that they shall walk in them, whereunto, in his grace, he has created them. Precisely what he requires of them who believe his gracious assurances, is, therefore, that they "be careful to maintain good works," in order that they may give a good account of themselves in the world. Titus 3:8. Faith and good works are the characteristics of God's elect, and where faith and good works are not, there are no elect.

There is no election, then, to the rewards of glory which does not include in itself, as the indispensable means to this end, election to the works of grace. We are not elected in order to dispense us from the necessity of being good. We are elected to make it possible for us to be good, yea, rather, to make it certain that we shall be good, not apart from but through our own efforts. We are not elected that we may not have to fight the good fight, but to secure that we

shall fight it to the end, fight it successfully, and so finish the course; not that we may not require to keep the faith, but that we may, that we shall, keep it triumphantly and receive the crown. We are not released by our election from the duties and struggles and strifes, not even from the trials and sufferings, of life: we are elected to be sustained in them and carried safely through them all. Another good old divine, John Davenant, therefore wisely instructs us that "Whosoever understandeth this doctrine aright, understandeth withal that he was elected not straight to be carried unto heaven on a bed of down, but to become conformable to the Head of the elect, Christ Jesus, as well in the cross as in the crown, and first in the cross, after in the crown." Yea, he adds, "afflictions therefore do not only not tire the patience of the elect, but they beget within them a secret spiritual joy. For, being afflicted, they rejoice and, as Luther says, 'Embrace their sufferings like relics consecrated by the touch of Christ.'"

Accordingly, Peter exhorts us, II Peter 1:10, to make our "calling and election sure" precisely by diligence in good works. He does not mean that by good works we may secure from God a decree of election in our behalf. He means that by expanding the germ of spiritual life which we have received from God into its full efflorescence, by "working out" our salvation, of course not without Christ but in Christ, we can make ourselves sure that we have really received the election to which we make claim. The salvation of God, being a "salvation in sanctification of the Spirit," ought, when worked out, to manifest

itself in such forms as faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly love, love. By working out the salvation which we have received into such a symphony of good works we make sure that it is the very salvation to which God has chosen his people. Good works become thus the mark and test of election, and, when taken in the comprehensive sense in which Peter is here thinking of them, they are the only marks and tests of election. We can never know that we are elected of God to eternal life except by manifesting in our lives the fruits of election —faith and virtue, knowledge and temperance, patience and godliness, love of the brethren, and that essential love which does not put limits to its object. He that gives diligence to cultivating such things in his life will not stumble in the way, for it is with such things in their hands that men enter the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. It is idle to seek assurance of election outside of holiness of life. Precisely what God chose his people to before the foundations of the world was that they should be holy. Holiness, because it is the necessary product, is therefore the sure sign of election. All holy people are the elect of God and are sure of eternal life.

It is folly, therefore, to fancy that a sincere lover of Jesus Christ who trusts in him as his Saviour and lovingly obeys him as his Lord, can possibly lack the election of God. It is only because he is one of God's elect that he can believe in Christ for the salvation of his soul, and follow after Christ in the conduct of his life. This is precisely what election brings with it—

the calling to Christ which cannot fail, justification which frees us from our guilt, and sanctification which conforms us to Christ, and all that that implies. It marks out those in the loving prevision of God whom his almighty grace shall raise out of their death in sin, to the powers of that new life in which and in which alone they embrace Jesus Christ as their all-sufficient Saviour and live in and for him. It is impossible that a believer in Christ should not be elected of God, because it is only by the election of God that one becomes a believer in Christ. Election is nothing but the preparation of grace, and grace is nothing but the loving operation of God unto salvation. Wherever there is salvation, then, there is, of course, grace, since grace alone can save, and wherever there is grace there is of course election, since grace hangs on election. We need not, we must not, seek elsewhere for proof of our election: if we believe in Christ and obey him, we are his elect children.

Certainly it is equally true that where no election is, neither is there salvation. Since all the salvation there is, is of grace, and grace is of election, there is of course no salvation where there is no election. But this does not mean that election excludes from salvation. What election does and all that election does, is to bring into salvation. It is not where it is, but only where it is not, that salvation fails. Wherever it is, there salvation is—certain, sure, complete salvation. Salvation is its sole work. When Christ stood at the door of Lazarus' tomb and cried, "Lazarus, come forth"! only Lazarus, of all the dead that lay in the gloom of the grave

that day in Palestine, or throughout the world, heard his mighty voice which raises the dead, and came forth. Shall we say that the election of Lazarus to be called forth from the tomb consigned all this immense multitude of the dead to hopeless, physical decay? It left them no doubt in the death in which they were holden and to all that comes out of this death. But it was not it which brought death upon them, or which kept them under its power. When God calls out of the human race, lying dead in their trespasses and sins, some here, some there, some everywhere, a great multitude which no man can number, to raise them by his almighty grace out of their death in sin and bring them to glory, his electing grace is glorified in the salvation it works. It has nothing to do with the death of the sinner, but only with the living again of the sinner whom it calls into life. The one and single work of election is salvation.

We may ask, no doubt, why God does not extend his saving grace to all; and why, if he sends it to some only, he sends it to just those some to whom he sends it rather than to others. These are not wise questions to ask. We might ask why Christ raised Lazarus only of all that lay dead that day in Palestine, or in the world. No doubt reasons may suggest themselves why he raised Lazarus. But why Lazarus only? If we threw the reins on the neck of imagination, we might possibly discover reasons enough why he might well have raised others, too, with Lazarus, perhaps many others, perhaps all the dead throughout the whole world. Doubtless he had his reasons for doing on that great day pre-

cisely what he did. No doubt God has his reasons, too, for doing just what he does with his electing grace. Perhaps we may divine some of them. No doubt there are others which we do not divine. Better leave it to him, and content ourselves, facing, in the depths of our ignorance and our sin-bred lack of comprehension, these tremendous realities, with the *O altitudo* of Paul; "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!" Or may we not even rise to the great consenting "Yea!" which Christ has taught us: "Yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight!" After all, men are sinners and grace is wonderful. The marvel of marvels is not that God, in his infinite love, has not elected all of this guilty race to be saved, but that he has elected any. What really needs accounting for—though to account for it passes the powers of our extremest flights of imagination—is how the holy God could get the consent of his nature to save a single sinner. If we know what sin is, and what holiness is, and what salvation from sin to holiness is, that is what we shall feel.

That is the reason why meditation on our eternal election produces such blessed fruits in our hearts and lives. That God has saved me, even me, sunk in my sin and misery, by the marvels of his grace, can only fill me with adoring praise. That he has set upon me from all eternity to save me, wretched sinner that I am—how can I express the holy joy that fills my heart at every remembrance of it! This is the foundation of all my comfort, the assurance

of all my hope. "Sure I am," says John Arrowsmith movingly, just to the point, "Sure I am that our blessed Saviour once said to his disciples, 'In this rejoice, that your names are written in heaven'; and that nothing doth more inflame a Christian's love than a firm belief of his personal election from eternity, after he has been able to evidence the writing of his name in heaven by the experience he hath had of an heavenly calling and an heavenly conversation. When the Spirit of God hath written the law of life in a Christian's heart, and therewith enabled him to know assuredly that his name is written in the book of life, he cannot then but melt with flames of holy affection, according to the most emphatic speech of Bernard—'God deserveth love from such as he hath loved long before they could deserve it;' and, 'His love to God will be without end, who knoweth that God's love to him was without any beginning.'" For this is the beginning and middle and end of the whole matter: that the election of God is but the beginning of God's manifestation of love to lost sinners, a beginning which must go before all other manifestations of his love because the purpose must precede the execution, and which carries all other manifestations with it because God never repents of his purposes but executes them.